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Tasmanians

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"It is very remarkable that the Tasmanians, who developed in their last struggle for life and liberty such remarkable warlike powers, should originally have been armed only with the very crudest weapons. We are distinctly told that these people had neither throwing-sticks (wommeras) nor boomerangs (Jeffreys, p. 126; Breton, p. 355; Davies, p. 419; Wentworth, p. 115). According to Marion du Fresne (p. 28): 'The men were all armed with pointed sticks, and some stones which appeared to us to have cutting edges, similar to the iron one of hatchets,' while Calder (Journ. p. 21) says: 'When his [the Tasmanian's] other weapons failed him, he fought with stones, and even with these was a very formidable opponent.' One authority (Meredith, Papers Roy. Soc. Tasm. Aug. 1873) says they had no shields. But Mr. Thirkell (*ibid.*) says, "They used a shield made of a piece of flat wood.' Their weapons were thus limited to the spear and the waddy."

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"La Billardière (I. ch. v. p. 233) speaks of javelins sixteen or eighteen feet in length, and says of them (II. ch. x. p. 25), 'This weapon was no more than a very straight long stick, which they had not taken the pains to smooth, but which was pointed at one end.' Melville describes the spear as 'a straight stick, varying in length from five to eight feet, usually made of curri-john, or the tea tree, with the bark scraped off and pointed at the 'thickest end' (p. 347) Widowson (p. 190) describes it as 'about twelve feet long, and as thick as the little finger of a man; the tea tree supplies them with this matchless weapon; they harden one end, which is very sharply pointed, by burning and filing it with a flint prepared for the purpose.'

Fourneaux (Cook, Second Voy. Bk. I. ch. vii.) thought the spear was made sharp by means of a shell or stone. Mortimer (p. 20) says, 'Their only weapon seems to be a rude spear, or lance, which is cut or scraped to a point at one end, but Calder (Journ. p. 21) says, 'The spear was pointed at both ends, and ten feet long [80] or more.' Henderson describes the weapon as follows (Bk. II. pp. 150-151): 'Their principal weapon is the spear, which is commonly six feet in length, and about the thickness of a man's finger. Straight boughs of several descriptions of shrubs are selected for the purpose of preparing them; and these, after being dried to hardness over a fire and carefully pointed, require but little strength in order to inflict a very severe wound.'"

"According to Davies (p. 419) the spear was made of the wood of leptospermum or mela-leuca, hard heavy woods. In the Report Roy. Soc. Van Diemen's Land for 1852, p. 325, there is the following statement: 'Mr. Milligan presented a waddie and six hunting spears of the aborigines of Tasmania, measuring between ten and fifteen feet in length, and made of a tall straight-grained Leptospermum, (1) "tea tree," of the colony.' Backhouse states (p. 172): 'In dressing their spears they [the aborigines] use a sharp flint of knife; in using the latter for this purpose, they hold it by the end of the blade. They straighten their spears till they balance as accurately as a well-prepared fishing rod, performing this operation with their teeth.' James Scott (Papers Roy. Soc. Tasm. July, 1873) also says: 'The ends of the spears were hardened by being a short time in the fire.' Mr. Thirkell speaks of the spears being jagged at the sharp end (Papers Roy. Soc. Tasm. Aug. 1873), and in reference to this statement we find (ibid.), 'In the eastern districts, with which Mr. Meredith was familiar, the blacks never jagged their spears, nor did they make use of a shield. The jagged spears and shields would therefore appear to have been used more particularly by the northern tribes, which were specially referred to by Mr. Thirkell.' The only reference to a poisoned spear is by Melville (p. 109), who, in the course of a fight, refers to a heavy barbed spear thirteen feet in length, fatally poisoned by plunging it into some decomposed carcase.' Calder (Journ.) quotes the following from an official

"1. Bunce says (pp. 23-24) it was L. lanigerum."

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letter from Mr. W. B. Walker: 'At their places of rendezvous, the natives keep a large stock of spears and waddies. The spears are carefully tied to straight trees with their points at some distance from the ground. '"

"Their other weapon, 'the waddy, was a short piece of wood, reduced and notched towards the grasp and slightly rounded at the point' (West, p. 84). Henderson speaks of it as about two feet long and 'which they are in the habit of employing for the purpose of despatching a wounded victim' (Bk. II. p. 151). [81] Thirkell says it is 'about two feet six inches long,' while Backhouse speaks of it (p. 90) as a short 'stick about an inch in thickness, brought suddenly to a conical point at each end and at one end a little roughened, to keep it from slipping out of the hand. This, they throw with a rotatory motion and with great precision.' 'The waddy was made of the leptospermum and mela-leuca, the hard, heavy woods used for making spears' (Davies, p. 419); and, according to Hull (Proc. Roy. Soc. Van Diemen's Land, vol. i. p. 156), 'The young wood of Pit-tosporum bicolor was formerly in high estimation among the aborigines of Tasmania, on account of its combined qualities of density, hardness, and tenacity, as the most suitable material of which to make their warlike implement the waddie.' Bligh (p. 51) speaks of the natives being armed with a 'a small stick, two or three feet long,' which was probably a waddy. Breton (p. 356), Melville (p. 348), and the Van Diemen's Land Annual, 1834 (p. 78) also mention the waddy."

"According to Mortimer (p. 20), who met some natives on an expedition, 'Mr. Cox made signs to one of them to throw his spear, which he did, to a considerable distance, and with a good deal of force; but I cannot conceive them to be a dangerous weapon.' But, as we shall see, Mortimer is the only writer who doubted the effectiveness of the Tasmanians' weapons, although Wentworth does say of their spears (p. 116): 'In using them they grasp the centre; but they neither throw them so far nor so dexterously as the natives of the parent colony' [New South Wales]. Mr. Prinsep in her letters has the following statement (p. 80): 'You will not wonder at our anxiety to avoid a rencontre with them and their formidable spears; a weapon they wield with deadly effect. We had seen six or seven kept as prisoners in Hobarton... They threw the spear for our amusement. This is merely a slender stick, none or ten feet long, sharpened at the heaviest end; they poise it for a few seconds in the hand, till it almost spins, by which means the spear flies with great velocity to the distance of sixty yards, and with unerring aim.' Dixon (II. p. 23) speaks of the personal agility and dexterity of the natives in wielding their weapons; and Jeffrey says (p. 126): 'They discharge the spear itself from their hands and are excellent marksmen.' Regarding the distance to which they could throw their lances, Lloyd says (p. 45): 'Forty yards was the extreme range of correct aim, with either spear or waddie, by the blacks of Tasmania.' Breton (p. 353) says: 'That they [82] throw the spear by the hand alone, and yet will strike a small object at a

distance of from forty to fifty yards, ' and of the waddy, it is 'a formidable instrument, as it is sent with almost unerring aim, and with such force that any person struck by it would receive a dangerous contusion or even a severe wound. It can be thrown with ease forty yards, and in its progress through the air goes horizontally, describing the same kind of circular motion that the boomerang does, with the like whirring noise. '"

"Of the spear Calder says (Journ. p. 21): It 'was thrown from the hand only, with great force and precision, having a range of, I believe, about sixty or seventy yards,' and of the waddy, 'It was held by the thinner end and was used either as a club or missile. Used for the latter purpose, it was hurled with awful force and certain aim.' According to the anonymous author in the Van Diemen's Annual (1834, p. 78): 'They are so extremely dexterous in the use of the spear, as seldom to miss a mark, even at a considerable distance; and in managing their waddies also, they display great skill and prowess,' while Melville (pp. 347-9) speaks as follows: 'They were extremely dexterous in the use of the spear; in throwing these to a considerable distance, or in using them when spearing fish in the water, they seldom missed the object aimed at,' and of their waddies: 'These they would throw with considerable force and extraordinary dexterity.' 'In throwing the spear they are very expert' (Widowson, p. 190). 'A shower of their spears, which they send through the air with a quivering motion, would be terribly destructive' (Backhouse, p. 172)."

"Mr. Meredith, in describing the murder of one of his father's stockmen, named Gay, by the blacks, says: 'About four hundred yards from the hut was a creek, in which the body of Gay was found, covered over with sticks; on being drawn out, many spear wounds were discovered, and one spear remained in one of the feet, having been driven through his thick boot-sole into the foot; but for this one spear, he might probably have escaped, being a very swift runner, and this fatal weapon must have struck him when flying at full speed from his murderers' (Home in Tasmania, p. 204). Ross mentions (p. 151), that on one occasion one of the stock-keepers was pursued by a party of natives, who 'struck him as he ran with five or six spears,' three of which 'had struck him in the back,' and 'one especially had penetrated his loins several inches. '"

"When Peletega, a chief, was confined in Hobart Town Gaol, in the year 1830, 'he took up an old broom stick, whilst standing at a distance of about twelve yards, threw it [83] in the manner of casting a spear, right through a small hole, although the aperture was scarcely half an inch larger than the stick that passed through it. At another time, taking up a small bit of lath, which some gentlemen trying to throw could not cast half the distance, he struck it directly through and through the middle of a hat, set up thirty yards off' (Parker, p. 34)."

"'If any quarrel took place among the men of the same tribe, it was the waddy that decided their affairs of honour' (Melville, p. 349). 'When they meet with the intention of fighting, it is the custom for one to receive a blow on the cranium, and then to return the blow on that of his adversary' (Breton, p. 355). 'When they fight among themselves, the chief weapon is the waddy, which they flourish in the air for some time, with boisterous threats and gestures, and then fall to in good earnest. . . . Their skulls are thicker [sic] than those of Europeans. They had need be so, to receive the blows that are inflicted on these occasions, as they sometimes appear heavy enough to fell an ox [sic]' (Van Diemen's Land Annual, 1834, p. 78)."

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"No account says anything of a boomerang, and West states they had no throwing sticks (II. p. 84)."